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Viewing cable 07ATHENS459, AEGEAN MIGRAINE: GREECE REACTS TO NATO EXERCISE

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07ATHENS459	2007-03-02 17:31	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Athens

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 000459

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/02/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: AEGEAN MIGRAINE: GREECE REACTS TO NATO EXERCISE
CANCELLATION

REF: HOTR 6 837 0051 07

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CHARLES RIES. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The February 26 decision to withdraw NATO

participation from the February 27 Noble Archer exercise over the Aegean island of Agios Efstratios has created an uproar in Greece. The Greek press blasted NATO for being "duped by Turkey" into believing the island's status was under dispute.

The normally low-key Greek armed forces chief Admiral Chinofotis told Embassy DATT that he believed the NATO system had been "abused." An attempt by the Greek government spokesman to provide NATO some breathing space by claiming the exercise had been postponed due to bad weather had little impact (beyond attracting ridicule); GOG officials reportedly plan to raise the issue in Brussels with the NATO SYG. At the same time, the Embassy has only just learned that when the exercise profile was published, Greek civilian air authorities issued a NOTAM naming Agios Efstratios and the island of Limnos in the exercise -- a move which undoubtedly piqued the Turks. The GoG, thus, may have been playing its own game with the issue. For the NATO-wary Greek public, the incident has reinforced its belief that the Alliance tilts toward Turkey -- and is simply unwilling to do its homework on Aegean issues. END SUMMARY.

NATO CANCELS EXERCISE OVER AGIOS EFSTRATIOS . . .

12. (SBU) On February 27, Greek media reported that NATO had canceled a scheduled training exercise involving Greek warplanes and at least one NATO AWAC, which was to have taken place in the north-central Aegean over the Greek island of Agios Efstratios (Saint Eustratius), located near the larger Greek islands of Limnos and Lesbos. Press reports (apparently accurately) noted the cancellation had occurred following a Turkish protest to NATO that the island was by treaty &demilitarized territory.⁸

13. (C) Greek official and press sources sharply countered that Agios Efstratios was not mentioned in any of the international treaties addressing the armed status of the Aegean islands and rejected as absurd the idea that the island might be regarded as a disputed &grey zone⁸ whose status as Greek territory was ever under question. NOTE: Turkey apparently did not object in the past when military exercises took place at Agios Efstratios, most notably during a joint, mid-sized, amphibious exercise, involving Greek and U.S. forces and code-named "Megas Alexandros", which took place in June 1998 and March 1999 in the sea region between Volos, Skyros and Agios Efstratios. END NOTE.

14. (C) The Embassy heard on March 2 that when the exercise profile was published, Greek civilian air authorities issued a NOTAM naming Agios Efstratios and the island of Limnos in the exercise plan. Given the on-going Greek-Turkish dispute over the demilitarized status of Limnos, the Greek decision to include it in the NOTAM undoubtedly piqued Turkish ire.

. . . CHOD PROTESTS TO DATT, GOG TO RAISE AT NATO

15. (C) On February 28, Greek armed forces chief Admiral Chinofotis called in Embassy DATT, providing details of the issue -- though without mentioning the question of Limnos in the NOTAM -- and suggesting that the NATO system had been "abused." The CHOD categorically rejected any notion that Agios Efstratios is or ever had been demilitarized (and noted that the Defense Minister had visited a small Greek platoon stationed on the island in 2006). Chinofotis told DATT frankly that, while he supported both the Alliance and the U.S., since the "inflammatory event" had already reached the press, there would be trouble.

16. (U) On March 1, Chinofotis told the daily "Kathimerini" that the Greek response to these most recent Turkish claims would be "thorough and immediate ... addressing every NATO command level." The admiral added, however, that NATO had no jurisdiction over international treaty interpretation. As for Agios Efstratios specifically, Chinofotis said the island, as part of Greek sovereign territory, could not be subject to any discussions between him and any of his foreign opposites "inside or outside NATO."

COMMENT

17. (C) There are many hot-button issues in Greece, but perhaps none is hotter than Greek sovereignty over islands in the Aegean. The nationalities of those involved, the short notice, and existing precedent for exercises in the area

raised the temperature. While the Greek and Turkish governments want to keep things cool, this is an election year in both countries. Thus, it is important that we be sensitive to the impact that NATO exercises can have on Aegean dynamics.

18. (C) We do not know whether the GoG was playing a game in including Limnos in issuing its NOTAM notice. Nor do we know whether a long-standing Turkish concern about Limnos or the newly minted concern about Agios Efstratios was a more important factor in NATO's decision. We are seeking to make clear to the GoG that we cannot help manage reaction to such issues if the GoG gives the entire story to the Greek press before raising it with us.

19. (C) We are not questioning NATO's long-standing practice of staying out of Greek-Turkish gamesmanship in the Aegean, nor do we wish to insert ourselves in NATO decision-making about exercises. The fall-out from this incident is minor for the Embassy, but potentially serious for NATO. The reinforced Greek public perception that NATO is reflexively anti-Greek will not help NATO achieve its goals of increased Greek involvement in Afghanistan and elsewhere. If Embassy Athens had been aware of the decision to cancel the exercise from a NATO or USG source rather than from the Greek CHOD and Greek press, we could have tried to manage the Greek response in such a way as to do less damage to NATO's image.

RIES